

Early-in-Year Student Withdrawal Notifications

Effective 21/02/2021

Academic Year 2018/19 to 2020/21

Introduction and Context

The Student Loans Company (SLC) does not routinely publish data on the withdrawal notifications it receives from Higher Education Providers (HEPs). However, during Academic Year (AY) 2020/21 to date, there has been significant public interest in this data in order to contribute towards an understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic may be impacting students. Therefore, SLC took the decision to publish this on an ad hoc basis as experimental statistics on 3 December 2020.

To provide insight into potential emerging trends, SLC are publishing an update of these figures, effective 21 February 2021.

Based on this data, SLC has not seen any increase in student withdrawal notifications for the purpose of student finance in this academic year, compared to the previous two years. In this respect, withdrawal notifications are currently slightly lower than the previous two years for UK & EU students funded by Student Finance England, Student Finance Wales and Student Finance Northern Ireland. Some of this reduction may be explained by the irregular start to the current academic year.

Overview

This is an ad hoc publication from SLC to provide the number of notifications that SLC has received from HEP informing that a student has withdrawn from their course for AY 2020/21. The data is compared to the same time period in the two previous academic years (2018/19 and 2019/20).

SLC requires HEPs to submit accurate and timely notifications of withdrawal decisions when a student has withdrawn from a university or college. This is to ensure our payments to the student and to the HEP are correct.

A withdrawal applies if the student leaves and does not intend to re-engage in their course. It means there is no further obligation on the student to pay fees to the HEP. A withdrawal terminates a student's period of student finance eligibility and SLC will recalculate their maintenance and tuition fee support.

The data shows a total count for UK & EU (outside UK) domiciled students funded by Student Finance England, Student Finance Wales and Student Finance Northern Ireland only. Scotland domiciled students studying in the UK have not been included. SLC does not hold as robust data concerning Scotland funded students as such notifications are handled by Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS).

The time period covered by the publication is from 1 August until 21 February inclusive for each academic year. For context, 1 August 2020 was the earliest course start date for the 2020/21 academic year and 21 February 2020 is the date of the latest data refresh of SLC databases prior to publication of this information. The same relative effective dates of the relevant year have been used for the previous academic years provided to allow for comparison.

The irregular start to AY 2020/21 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has included a number of courses starting later than in previous years, some universities extending the ‘cooling off’ period before the student becomes liable for tuition fees and, more generally, an increase in the potential for administrative disruption.

It is possible these irregularities may have resulted in HEPs providing withdrawal notifications to SLC later. Therefore, while the two previous years’ data has been provided for comparison, any conclusions should be made with caution noting the irregularities of this academic year and the early in-year nature of the data sets.

What can you use these statistics for?

This data includes only those students approved for funding by SLC and confirmed as enrolled and attending their course between AY 2018/19 and 2020/21. It does not include students who have not been awarded student finance from SLC. Whilst the majority of UK students apply for student finance, not all do and therefore, these statistics should not be used to analyse trends or to draw conclusions regarding the full UK student population.

Caveats and Data Definitions

- The data included in this release is Full Time and Part Time Undergraduates only. Postgraduate data is not included.
- Data is produced from notifications of ‘withdrawal’. Any notification which has been marked as ‘Never Attended’ or ‘Deceased’ are not included within these counts. Notifications which are marked as ‘Suspended’ are also not included.
- Any notification that contains manual errors regarding notification, withdrawal or course dates have been excluded as these will be required to be re-submitted by HEPs.
- Any notification that is associated with an ineligible application for student finance has been excluded.
- Any notification which has been marked as ‘deleted’ by HEPs have been excluded.
- These are experimental statistics and due to the irregularities of this AY and the early in year nature of this dataset any conclusions should be made with caution.

Results

Figure 1: Student Withdrawal Notifications from HEPs by Domicile and Academic Year: 2018/19 to 2020/21

Coverage: Students domiciled in UK and EU (Outside UK) domiciled receiving student support (except Scotland-funded students)

Effective Date: 21 February of relevant Academic Year

Domicile	Count of Withdrawal Notifications		
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
England	13,965	14,956	12,938
Wales	853	849	717
Northern Ireland	564	495	390
EU (Outside UK) *	424	452	376
Overall	15,806	16,752	14,421

* EU (Outside UK) are funded by either England, Wales or Northern Ireland

Figures include only Full Time and Part Time Undergraduate students (not Postgraduate)

Constituent parts may not add to totals due to rounding.

Due to irregularities noted, such as late course start dates, the year on year figures may not be comparable.

Figure 2: Student Withdrawal Notifications from HEPs by Domicile as % of Total Withdrawal Notifications: 2018/19 to 2020/21

Coverage: Students domiciled in UK and EU (Outside UK) domiciled receiving student support (except Scotland-funded students)

Effective Date: 21 February of relevant Academic Year

Domicile	% of Total Withdrawal Notifications		
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
England	88%	89%	90%
Wales	5%	5%	5%
Northern Ireland	4%	3%	3%
EU (Outside UK) *	3%	3%	3%
Overall	100%	100%	100%

Note:

* EU (Outside UK) are funded by either England, Wales or Northern Ireland

Figures include only Full Time and Part Time Undergraduate students (not Postgraduate)

Constituent parts may not add to totals due to rounding.

Due to irregularities noted, such as late course start dates, the year on year figures may not be comparable.

Figure 3: % Change of Student Withdrawal Notifications from HEPs by Domicile and Academic Year: 2018/19 to 2020/21

Coverage: Students domiciled in UK and EU (Outside UK) domiciled receiving student support (except Scotland-funded students)

Effective Date: 21 February of relevant Academic Year

Domicile	% Change Year on Year	
	2018/19 to 2019/20	2019/20 to 2020/21
England	7%	-13%
Wales	0%	-16%
Northern Ireland	-12%	-21%
EU (Outside UK) *	7%	-17%
Overall	6%	-14%

Note:

* EU (Outside UK) are funded by either England, Wales or Northern Ireland

Figures include only Full Time and Part Time Undergraduate students (not Postgraduate)

Constituent parts may not add to totals due to rounding.

Due to irregularities noted, such as late course start dates, the year on year figures may not be comparable.

Definitions

Domiciled	The country in which the applicant would normally reside in the three years prior to the start of the course.
Student	For the purpose of this publication, an applicant for student support becomes a student once the Student Loans Company has received confirmation that the applicant is attending a course with a Higher Education Provider. Not all applicants take up a place.

Withdrawal	Withdrawal refers to the point at which scheduled learning; teaching and assessment activities; and other active and on-going engagement end in agreement with the provider.
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Data Sources

This publication uses data from SLC's administrative systems. For details of the administrative data sources used in our publications see the [Statement of Administrative Sources](#).

Data Quality

SLC has published the Quality Guidelines that it follows. As per those guidelines a Quality Plan is produced for each publication. The Quality Plan stipulates two stages of Quality Assurance. Data is extracted from the administrative systems then reviewed using a standard Quality Assurance checklist. The statistical tables created using that data are quality assured using the Statistical Quality guidelines. See our [Quality Guidelines](#) for further information.

Related Statistics Publications

The first publication of these experimental statistics, released on 3 December 2020 (data effective 29 November 2020) can be found [here](#).

SLC publish statistics on Higher Education Funding for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. These are published at the same time as part of the series [Student Support for Higher Education](#). The [latest release](#) of this series covers AY 2019/20, with high-level early indication of AY 2020/21 figures (as at 31 October 2020).

The full publication can be found here [Student Support for Higher Education](#).

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